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SOVIET OBJECTIVES IN THE BERLIN CRISIS

Submitted by the

DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and The Joint Staff.

Concurred in by the

UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

on 23 December 1958. Concurring were The Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State; the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army; the Director of Naval Intelligence; the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF; the Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff; the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, Special Operations; and the Director of the National Security Agency. The Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the USIB and the Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of their jurisdiction.

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SOVIET OBJECTIVES IN THE BERLIN CRISIS

THE PROBLEM

To assess Soviet objectives and probable policy in the Berlin situation.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Moscow's move to raise the issue of Berlin at this time is probably not the result of any single development but stems from several converging factors; some of these bear on the shoring up of the Communist position in Eastern Europe, others on weakening the Allied position in Germany and in Western Europe generally. We view Moscow's move as another manifestation of the hardening tendency in Soviet foreign policy and of the Soviet's growing confidence in the general strength of the Bloc's position vis-a-vis the Western Powers.

2. We believe that the Soviet objectives in their move against Berlin include:

a. To remove or reduce the disruptive influence which Berlin poses to the East German regime and thus to the consolidation of the Soviet order in Eastern Europe.

b. To increase the international prestige of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in order to strengthen the regime's internal position and to support the Soviet-GDR program to "reunify" Germany by confederation.

c. To move the West toward acceptance of the USSR's version of the *status quo* in Eastern Europe.

d. To foster discord among the NATO states, to reduce West German confidence in its allies, and to encourage Bonn to seek a separate deal with the USSR on the German problem.

e. To bring about West Germany's withdrawal from NATO and to impose limitation on German armament, and particularly to prevent German acquisition of a nuclear capability.

f. To maneuver the West into accepting Soviet proposals for an early summit meeting and perhaps to induce the US to enter bilateral top-level negotiations.

3. If the Soviets fail to make significant progress in possible negotiations with the Allies, they will sooner or later have to face up to the question of fulfilling their announced intention to turn over to East Germany their controls over access to West Berlin. Their decision will be greatly affected by the Soviet assessment of

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the degree of tension which had developed and particularly the firmness of the Western position at the time, and it is possible that the Soviet leaders might decide to back down under whatever smokescreen of explanation seems most expedient. However, we consider it more likely that the USSR would proceed with the turnover of controls to the East Germans. The Soviet leaders probably intend to be cautious and tactically flexible. We believe that they will try to direct Soviet and East German maneuvering in a manner which will avoid military conflict with the Western allies, while at the same time they will be prepared to take advantage of any signs of weakness on the part of the West, or of inclinations to compromise on major issues. Nevertheless, they have already committed themselves considerably, and we believe that the crisis may be severe, with considerable chance of miscalculation by one or both sides.

DISCUSSION

4. Moscow's move to raise the issue of Berlin at this time is probably not the result of any single development but stems from several converging factors; some of these bear on the shoring up of the Communist position in Eastern Europe, others on weakening the Allied position in Germany and in Western Europe generally. We view Moscow's move as another manifestation of the hardening tendency in Soviet foreign policy and of the Soviet's growing confidence in the general strength of the Bloc's position vis-a-vis the Western Powers. Khrushchev apparently genuinely believes that Soviet weapons advances and economic successes are shifting the world balance of power. The strength of this conviction, frequently expressed in recent Communist pronouncements, is evident from the firmness with which he has demanded that the issue of Berlin be reopened. Soviet leaders must be aware that there is virtually no point of controversy between East and West on which the West has so thoroughly committed itself, and that there can scarcely be a more dangerous international issue to push to the point of crisis.

5. We do not believe that the more assertive tone of Soviet foreign policy in general or the Soviet move on Berlin in particular indicate any greater Soviet willingness deliberately to risk general war. The Soviets have almost certainly not intended to give the crisis the character of a military showdown but have intended to develop it in political terms. Thus Moscow will seek to avoid placing itself in any position from which it must either back down completely or resort to military force. Nevertheless, Soviet prestige is already strongly committed on the Berlin issue: the Soviet Government has announced that it will turn over to the East Germans its functions in Berlin, including access controls. The Soviets have given public assurances of military support to East Germany in the event that the latter's "frontiers" are "violated" by the Allies. The Soviets may even believe that the West itself is less disposed to run substantial risk of war and that therefore the Western Alliance is more likely to give in to pressure.

PRINCIPAL SOVIET OBJECTIVES

6. We believe that the Soviet objectives in their move against Berlin include:

a. To remove or reduce the disruptive influence which Berlin poses to the East German regime and thus to the consolidation of the Soviet order in Eastern Europe.

b. To increase the international prestige of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in order to strengthen the regime's internal position and to support the Soviet-GDR program to "reunify" Germany by confederation.

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c. To move the West toward acceptance of the USSR's version of the *status quo* in Eastern Europe.

d. To foster discord among the NATO states, to reduce West German confidence in its allies, and to encourage Bonn to seek a separate deal with the USSR on the German problem.

e. To bring about West Germany's withdrawal from NATO and to impose limitation on German armament, and particularly to prevent German acquisition of a nuclear capability.

f. To maneuver the West into accepting Soviet proposals for an early summit meeting and perhaps to induce the US to enter bilateral top-level negotiations.

7. The first three of these objectives are concerned with shoring up the Communist position in Eastern Europe, a problem which has preoccupied the Soviets especially during the past few years. The political and economic stability of the GDR has been a troublesome problem, which has been pointed up in recent months by the flight of professional personnel through West Berlin. If the Western Powers could be persuaded to withdraw their forces from Berlin, the GDR authorities would be able to restrict the flow of refugees as well to reduce the political challenge which West Berlin has presented the GDR. Together with implicit Western recognition of East Germany, these developments would significantly reinforce the Soviet position in Eastern Europe by giving permanence and stability to the weakest and most exposed of the satellite regimes. Barring an Allied withdrawal, the Soviets hope to force the Allies into official dealings with East German authorities on the question of access to Berlin. They hope thus to strengthen the international prestige of East Germany, formalize the division of Germany (with adverse effects on the populations of both West and East Germany), and lay the foundation for further pressure on the Allies' presence in Berlin.

8. At the same time, and by the same measures, the Soviet leaders aim to undermine the Allied position in Western Europe. They probably believe that they can use a Berlin crisis to exploit latent differences among the Allies concerning the German problem in general, and the method of dealing with the GDR in particular. They hope to estrange the Federal Republic from its allies, since any Western accommodation with the GDR would convince large sections of German opinion that the West was retreating from the position it had hitherto taken on reunification. The Soviet leaders probably believe that any apparent failure of the Bonn Government to maintain close association with the Western great powers would undermine its domestic position, spread feelings of helplessness and isolation among the West German population, and lead to broader support for an attempt to explore the possibility of a separate deal with the USSR on the German problem. It is probably the Soviet view that if such tendencies became dominant in West Germany, the collapse of NATO and its defense structure would be in sight.

POSSIBLE COURSES OF SOVIET ACTION

9. The Soviets almost certainly did not expect Western acceptance of their 27 November proposal to make West Berlin a "free city." They probably foresee some form of negotiations with the allies before they turn over to the East Germans control over Western access to Berlin. However, it is possible that in certain eventualities, such as an outright Western refusal to enter into negotiations, the Soviets would take this step before the expiration of the six months' period stipulated in their note. At any stage of the crisis, of course, they may threaten to make such a move in order to put pressure on the Allies. But, on the whole, we believe it unlikely that they will actually make a precipitate move, regardless of initial Western responses.

10. The Soviets probably now anticipate a Western proposal to discuss Berlin within the context of the entire German problem. We do not think that such a proposal would be greeted with outright Soviet rejection but would probably be met with counteroffers designed to exploit any show of Allied indecision generated by the Berlin crisis.

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11. At least initially, any such counteroffers would probably center around Soviet proposals for disengagement in Central Europe and/or for negotiations on a German peace treaty. These might be presented in the form of a Soviet package for a general European settlement which would include such proposals as a revised Rapacki Plan, the immediate conclusion of a German peace treaty as a step toward confederation of two German states, and an East-West nonaggression pact. The Soviets might make some conciliatory gestures in order to render their proposals more palatable.

12. In making such proposals, the Soviets would estimate that certain elements of European opinion would react favorably to those features of their proposals which provide for military disengagement — withdrawal of forces and banning of nuclear weapons from Central Europe. They would expect to appeal in particular to those Westerners who regard the presence of nuclear-equipped forces of both sides in Germany as a main cause of tension and war danger. They would hold out the prospect to the Social Democrats and neutralists in West Germany that further progress toward unification would be possible once acceptance of Soviet proposals had brought a general easing of the tensions which surround the German problem. By appeals of this kind to various elements of opinion in Europe, they would try to make it as difficult as possible for the Western European Powers to reject their proposals altogether.

13. We believe it likely that at some moment which the Soviets judge favorable they will again bring forward a dramatic proposal for a summit meeting on the whole array of issues which will have been raised. The moment chosen for this move would be one at which tensions were high over the prospect of a deadlock, and at which the Soviets might consider opinion in the West to be deeply divided over the next steps. In such a summit meeting the Soviets would try to bring the Western Powers to accept agreements which, while trumpeted as a great advance for peace, would in fact amount to acceptance of the main Soviet terms.

14. Whether or not a summit meeting develops, the Soviets, either to stimulate further negotiations on Germany as a whole or to overcome a deadlock, might at some stage attach new features to their "free city" proposals to make them more attractive to Western opinion. They may, for example, offer to include East Berlin in their proposal for a demilitarized "free city." They may also offer to place access to the city under formal UN guarantees, perhaps with UN observers present in the city and on access routes. Such offers would almost certainly still be conditional on the continuation of a Communist government in the Eastern sector, an end to the East German refugee flow through West Berlin, and a cessation of Allied "subversive" and intelligence activities in the city.

15. We thus believe that Soviet tactics will retain some flexibility, the better to take advantage of the situation as it develops. However, Soviet opposition to German reunification on any basis other than a confederation which preserved Communist East Germany will be in the background of all Soviet maneuvers. The Soviet leaders almost certainly do not contemplate relinquishing control over East Germany because of the threat such action would pose to their whole position in Eastern Europe, beginning with Poland.

16. If the Soviets fail to make significant progress in possible negotiations with the Allies, they will sooner or later have to face up to the question of fulfilling their announced intention to turn over to East Germany their controls over access to West Berlin. Their decision will be greatly affected by the Soviet assessment of the degree of tension which had developed and particularly the firmness of the Western position at the time, and it is possible that the Soviet leaders might decide to back down under whatever smokescreen of explanation seems most expedient. However, we consider it more likely that the USSR would proceed with the turnover of controls to the East Germans. The Soviet leaders probably intend to be cautious and tactically flexible. We believe that they will try to direct Soviet and East German maneuver-

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